

## **RISHI VALLEY SCHOOL**

### **THE FIRST FORTY YEARS**

Based on Historical Work by **Roshen Dalal**  
Edited by Hans and **Radhika Herzberger**  
With an afterword by **Alok Mathur**

#### **Editorial Note**

The account that follows is based on work undertaken by Roshen Dalal in 1992-94 as part of a History Project sponsored by Krtshnamurti Foundation India under the direction of the present editors. The main source is a collection of materials compiled by Dr. Dalal for use by Rishi Valley Education Centre and deposited in the archives when she left the project in 1994. These materials include interviews, notes on index cards and several hundred pages of narrative drafts towards a projected history of Rishi Valley from ancient times to the present, prepared by Dr. Dalal for the History Project. Her narrative drafts, though incomplete, recounted the first forty years of Rishi Valley School in considerable detail. From these materials, the editors have distilled the following pages, after much abridgement and extensive editing. An effort was made to retain Dr. Dalal's formulations on the whole, but several sections incorporate new material and take into account the results of subsequent research. We have also appended material from a talk prepared by Alok Mathur, to outline some developments at Rishi Valley during its second forty years (1960-2000). Details of our primary sources, including interviews, correspondence and miscellaneous documents, are listed in the "Note on Sources" at the end of this document.

## **RISHI VALLEY SCHOOL — THE FIRST FORTY YEARS**

### **§1. A Valley and Its Rishis**

"I remember," said Narayanappa," visiting a cave on Rishikonda, where I saw golden images lit by oil lamps, and footprints of a rishi who had lived in these hills from the time of the Mahabharata. There were other rishis too, but he was the oldest and the wisest. Now there are no rishis left here. Even Krishnamurti has gone" He became silent. A few months later Narayanappa, who had once been the local postmaster, died in Rishi Valley, at the age of eighty. There are other legends too of rishis living on the hills — old stones of a sage named Manvya with a gurukulam nearby and later reports of lights that were said to be lamps carried by rishis on the slopes of Rishikonda. From those legends Rishi Valley derived its name.

The surrounding region has a tradition of sacredness. One writer on Vedic geography refers to the Thettu basin surrounded by granite hills, as forming a *Srichakra*, and he calls it a place of *parashakti*. To this day, many ancient forms of worship are practised locally. Villagers place aniconic stones in certain locations and hold them to be sacred. They tie strings around certain neem trees and place offerings of flowers, kumkum, haldi, rice and

coconuts before them. Walking towards Thettu Village one finds numerous small shrines at the base of peepal trees. On the outskirts of the harijanvada there is a small Gangamma temple with a pillared portico and an inner shrine for the mother goddess. This is the site of ancient pastoral rituals that are still practised twice each year. Beyond the Gangamma temple is a small Shiva shrine with lingams placed outside. In Thettu Village there is a naga shrine, and nearby is a Venugopalaswamy temple. Ancient rituals are practised in these places.

## §2. Dreams of A World University

In 1925 Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society, decided to build a 'World University.' Three possible sites were identified near the birthplace of Krishnamurti and he was asked to look them over. At one of the sites, in Thettu Valley, a big banyan tree attracted his notice. He climbed up to Cheetah Rock, near the present main road, and surveyed the whole valley. The hills reminded him of another valley he knew, in America. In a letter he wrote that it was "like California around Ojai. We went round various parts and at last came upon the best place . I have dreamt about it twice ... It has really a fine atmosphere." He asked his colleague C.S. Trilokekar to acquire one thousand acres of land in the valley. Trilokekar moved from hamlet to hamlet by bullock-cart, slowly buying small parcels of land until a three hundred acre campus had been assembled. He arranged for maps to be drawn. On these maps he assigned names to several hills and other prominent features, and he named the whole basin 'Rishi Valley.'

This was a chronic drought area that throughout living memory had suffered from failed monsoons, poverty, famines, and epidemics. If Krishnamurti had not been born at Madanapalle, there may not have been much to recommend the Thettu region as a site for a World University. It had little historical significance and was economically backward. Thomas Munro, a young civil servant of the East India Company, called it "an area of robbers." Yet according to legend, one of the rishis who lived there two hundred years ago had predicted that this desolate area would one day be well known, and people from all over the world would travel there to see it.

Krishnamurti apparently shared this vision, and gave some thought to realising it. Soon after choosing the site he wrote: "What has absorbed most of my thoughts and time [recently] is a scheme for... an International University ... [That] has long been a dream of mine and ... is now going to be realised. A party of us motored down to Madanapalle on two different occasions.. We selected a semi-circular valley... far enough from town and near enough to a railway station to combine most pleasantly isolation with easy access. We are now negotiating purchase of the land. As soon as this is done .. we shall lay out the grounds, dig more wells and plant more trees.. We intend to move the Theosophical School at Guindy ... [there] to form a nucleus of students and faculty which, I have no doubt, will rapidly grow into an International centre ... I hope [people] all over the world will contribute ... to making it a stupendous success." (*Herald of the Star* Apr 25)

Before the land at Rishi Valley was completely assembled, Mrs. Besant abandoned her project for a World University, announcing that for the time being it would exist "only on the mental plane. Plans were changed and the land became available for some other purpose. Within a few years, circumstances transformed the dream of a World University into the reality of Rishi Valley School.

### §3. Krishnamurti on the Aims of Education

In a more expansive history, the origins of Rishi Valley School could be narrated against the background of larger events and ideas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including the growing national consciousness in India, the freedom movement, and new ideas in education sweeping through Europe, America and India. This would include the educational programme of Annie Besant, whose followers built Rishi Valley and ran it during its early years. Viewed in that context, Krishnamurti's own ideas on education would stand out in sharper relief. But the present account skips over much of that background to sample Krishnamurti's philosophy of education on its own terms.

Krishnamurti saw traditional education as a servant of national, civic or economic interests, designed to produce efficient workers and patriotic citizens. By contrast, the kind of education he favoured was designed "to help people understand the ways of society and not be caught in its net." The primary instrument for this understanding was an awakening of intelligence, which in his terms implied both human goodness and a strong sense of individual responsibility.

"The purpose, aim and drive of these schools," he declared, "is to equip the child ... [to]function with clarity and efficiency in the modern world, and far more important to create the right climate so that the child may develop fully as a human being. This means giving him the opportunity to flower in goodness so that he is rightly related to people, things and ideas, to the whole of life." Children educated in this way would not be self-centred, they would not be "bourgeois," working only for their own little concerns. "A mind that is not" concerned with itself, that is free of ambition, not caught up in its own desires or driven by its own pursuit of success — such a mind flowers in goodness." Children educated in this way would have a long vision and a global outlook. "I would like my children to have a view of the world as a whole." Children educated in this way might be better positioned to bring about "a different kind of society ... without violence, without the contradictions of various beliefs, dogmas, rituals, gods, without economic divisions." And he insisted: "We must have a different kind of society"

### §4. A Progressive School in Madras (1918-31)

By a curious twist of fate, a well-established school in Madras would be in search of a *new* location a few years after the World University Project in Rishi Valley was abandoned. This was the same Guindy School that had earlier been proposed to form the nucleus for the World University. Eventually the school in Madras and the land in Rishi Valley were brought together, when the Guindy School moved its teachers, library, furniture and many of its students from Madras to re-establish itself as Rishi Valley School.

#### §4.1 Beginnings

What later became known as the Guindy School began operations in temporary quarters at Sadhr Gardens in Madras. Mrs. Besant started this school in 1918, to put her educational theories into practice. G.V. Subba Rao, a young theosophist, was chosen to be the first Headmaster. GVS, as he was commonly called, came from a Brahmin family of Guntur, in what is now Andhra Pradesh. After earning a double MA in Economics and Mathematics, he had taught for several years at the Central Hindu College in Benares. There he joined a group that was brought together by Mrs. Besant to work with Krishnamurti. After some time he moved south and soon took up responsibility for the new school in Madras.

Subba Rao assembled a very able faculty and built up an excellent library with an open-shelf system and a very large collection of books. The teachers were loyal and highly dedicated. Several of his stalwarts came from one family in Coimbatore. They were so devoted to their work that, like Subba Rao himself, they never married. They gave their lives entirely to education. To supplement the academic staff, musicians, artists and other creative people were invited to live in the community and continue their work. This created a rich cultural atmosphere to enhance the students' lives.

At Sadhr Gardens, the medium of instruction was Tamil, with English as a second language. Students lived in a 'Village' of ten rustic cottages surrounded by shady trees. There was friendship and sympathy between teachers and students. Games, scouting, manual training, gardening, weaving and dyeing were part of the regular curriculum. Each day, time was set aside for nature study and gardening. Tamil songs were sung in morning sessions, and Gita classes were held under the trees. After school hours, senior students were expected to do some social service.

In 1919, the school was shifted to a twenty-one acre campus on the Guindy road in Adyar. From that time on it was known colloquially as The Guindy School, although it had other official designations before it finally became Rishi Valley School.

#### §4.2 Progressive Developments

In the days when most schools in India were teaching by rote, when corporal punishment was an accepted practice and when the caste system was an accepted structure, GVS created a non-sectarian school, awakening the intelligence of students and helping them develop their talents in a nurturing atmosphere.

A significant innovation was the admission of girl students. The Guindy School was one of the earliest co-educational schools in India. Girls were admitted, first as day-scholars and later as students in residence. In 1923 Mrs. Besant inaugurated the Girls' Section and spoke of the importance of girls' education for the regeneration of India.

In 1926 GVS was invited to visit progressive schools in Europe, with special attention to Montessori schools. He brought back to India a set of Montessori teaching materials. After having these materials reproduced in the school's carpentry shop, he set up a Montessori Section in the Junior School. At all levels, GVS experimented with innovations in teaching methods. Classes were interspersed with self-study periods so that students could complete the assigned lessons during the day, keeping their evenings free from studies. A system of individual studies was introduced for higher classes, based on the 'Dalton Plan.' This allowed individual students to find their level and proceed at

their own pace. Students worked independently on their assignments, under the guidance of a teacher who could provide help when needed. Teachers prepared all the assignment sheets by hand, making four carbon copies at a time. Students made their own work plans, scheduling their studies for a one week in advance. At the end of each week they reviewed their work to see how much of their own plan had been covered. To do this effectively each student kept a diary 'My Book of Studies' to record the plan of work for particular time-slots on each day of the week.

Students went from class to class without competing or doing exams. But they were closely monitored by teachers, and given constant feedback on the assignments completed. At the SSLC level, teachers prepared a glossary of unfamiliar words with English-Tamil translations. Students were made to account for poor, incomplete or carelessly done work. They were free to take the SSLC exam at the usual time, or postpone it for a year if they did not feel ready for it. There was no stigma of failure attached to this. When they felt ready, they prepared for the school-leaving exam. They developed confidence in working at their own pace.

#### §4.3 After Hours

At night everyone met for roll call, a time of the day all old students remember with nostalgia. At this Subba Rao discussed various matters with them, gave a talk or read out of a book. One day he would talk about Buddha's Eight-fold Path. Another day he might read from *Light of Asia* or entertain the children with passages from *Three Men in a Boat*. He would carefully enunciate each word, and explain the difficult words. All the students were encouraged to read and became quite fluent in English. On Saturday nights there would be skits or dramas in Telugu, Tamil or English.

In a spirit of social service, senior students were encouraged to assist in evening classes under the guidance of a teacher. When the school became co-educational, girls were also prepared for public service, so that as women they would be ready to move beyond their household duties to participate in the 'regeneration of India.'

### §5. Subba Rao at Rishi Valley (1931-42)

#### §5.1 The Guindy School Migrates

The purchase of land at Rishi Valley had begun in early 1926. By the end of that year, 135 acres of land had been purchased in 21 separate sale deeds, at an average price of Rs 41 per acre. Well boring was tried and a meagre supply of water was found at a depth of 30 feet. Bit by bit, more land was purchased, over the next five years. In 1929, when most of the Rishi Valley land had been acquired, a cottage was built so that visitors could stay overnight. This structure, named 'Krishna Cottage,' was situated near the Banyan tree. It had two large bedrooms and a kitchen.

Meanwhile the space available at Guindy was limited and its neighbourhood was becoming urbanised, crowded and noisy. The thatched cottages were difficult to maintain and the Northeast monsoon caused damage to them every year. In late 1930, when a tremendous cyclone blew down many of the cottages, Krishnamurti met with Subba Rao

and they decided to move the whole school to Rishi Valley. Instead of being the nucleus for an International University, it was to retain its character as a school in spacious new surroundings.

Several engineers were brought in to supervise construction work at Rishi Valley. They were all theosophists who were attracted by Krishnamurti's teachings. One of them, Rajagopal Iyengar, took premature retirement from his work as a civil engineer in the Madras Government Public Works Department. He stayed in Rishi Valley as a senior administrator for many years. In addition to his official work, he provided simple medical services and generous help to local villagers.

With the dedicated and self-sacrificing spirit characteristic of theosophical workers of those days, sufficient structures were ready to accommodate the school by September 1931. The engineers worked long hours under extremely trying conditions. They lived in Krishna cottage along with two cooks and one or two assistants. At night they had to stay inside the cottage with the doors shut and employ villagers to keep away wild animals which roamed the valley at night. None of the engineers accepted any payment. One of them gave his entire provident fund on loan to support the building work; another, who had worked for the railways, helped to provide steel girders and other materials for construction.

As the basic structures neared completion Subba Rao planned the logistics of moving the furniture, teaching and laboratory material, library books, kitchen equipment and cattle from Madras. This move was made without dislocating the day-to-day running of the school, until the last shift. Finally, in September 1931 approximately ninety students, along with their teachers, relocated to Rishi Valley. Two hundred of their fellow students stayed behind to join other institutions in Madras. Those who moved went with a pioneering spirit, to a campus that was still under construction.

#### §5.2. Pioneers in the Wilderness

The first few months were a great adventure. Food was cooked in the Krishna Cottage kitchen and everyone ate from leaves, in the shade of the Banyan tree. Sometimes a gust of wind would blow away the leaves. Ants took a share of the food, and snakes occasionally wandered by. The only source of water was one hand-pump. Later a larger kitchen was established in a temporary structure near the present library. The houses had no full walls, only parapets less than three feet high. Children slept on mattresses on the floor and covered themselves with blankets to keep out the wind and the cold.

That year, 1931, the rainfall was unprecedented. Fifty inches of rain fell, most of it within a month of the school moving to Rishi Valley. Rivulets and streams overflowed, and wells filled with water. The dry-lands were soaked, and there was a bumper crop in the region. Villagers felt the coming of the school had blessed the area and brought prosperity. But the rain was a mixed blessing. Malaria was rampant, and many students came down with fever. They had to hunt for dry places to sleep in as the wind and rain swept through the open houses. But the pioneers persevered.

There was no electricity in the school. Lanterns and petromax lamps provided light for studying. In 1934, a small dynamo was fixed to provide electricity for some houses and for street lights. That same year, Surendranath Kar, a noted architect from Shantiniketan

was invited to Rishi Valley to suggest some changes. On his advice, a hall was added to each wing of the existing houses, and the present facades for the hostels were constructed, along with the ground floor of the present Principal's residence.

The Guindy School was ready to take on a new life now as The School, Rishi Valley.' Its subsequent history up to 1960 can be divided into two educationally strong decades — one under Subba Rao (roughly the 1930s) and another under Gordon Pearce (roughly the 1950s) — with an unsteady decade between them (roughly the 1940s).

### § 5.3 Building the Infrastructure

By 1934 the basic structures had been built. But construction work continued in the school. As enrolment grew, around thirty children lived in each house, in three rooms for ten students each. In the early years children slept on mattresses on the floor. Some houses also served as schoolrooms for junior children.

The first building was the present Senior School Building, an enclosed square structure with classrooms around a central courtyard. It was functionally designed for maximum flexibility, and to this day the room partitions have been endlessly modified to suit new conditions. Some students and early visitors report that initially there were no full walls — only pillars, a parapet wall and a roof. Others say this was the one building in the school that did have full walls and locking facilities, as it housed all the valuable equipment of the school. Several students remember that walls between classrooms were not full — classes were partitioned by books. But in the course of time, full walls were built. An assembly hall was later added at one end of the School Building. The dining area consisted of three open verandahs surrounding the kitchen. Children sat on the floor and ate from brass plates set on wooden planks.

Oil lanterns and petromax lamps were used for lighting. There was no electricity at all until 1937, when two dynamos began to provide electricity for a few hours during the day. It was a period of austerity. The school was always short of money, in spite of the best efforts of those who ran and organised it.

### §5.4 Renewing the Landscape

In the nineteenth century, the surrounding hills were said to have many trees and thick undergrowth. Wild animals were common; small mammals and reptiles were numerous. The low-lying land had bushes and a few large trees mostly along the banks of seasonal streams. The area was only sparsely cultivated. There were few inhabitants and little water.

Within a few years of acquiring land for the school, tree planting started in and around the campus. Students and staff helped in watering and looking after the saplings, which included neem and tamarind trees near the hostels. Some of the uncultivated land was cleared of undergrowth and brought under cultivation. One main stream, Thettuvanka, also known as 'Bahuda River,' flowed through part of the cultivated area and supported a few wetland crops. In the late 1940's there were severe droughts and famine conditions prevailed in the area.

### §5.5 GVS as Headmaster

GVS was committed to a life of service, which in his case meant austere living and total dedication to the work of education. He led a very strict and disciplined life, with the absolute minimum in food, clothing and possessions. He began his day at 4.30 a.m. After finishing his preparations for the morning he would go around the houses to watch the day beginning for his staff and students. No small detail would escape his eyes in the matter of cleanliness of surroundings, the orderly arrangement of the houses and the children's routine, dress, health or diet.

For GVS, the children were everything. He sat with them for lunch and dinner. Often, after the children had retired for the night, he would get the housemasters together for tea and a snack. They would chat for a while, or sit together in silent communion before retiring for the night. GVS expected his teachers to be as austere, as dedicated and selfless as he was. They had to rise early and see to every detail of the children's lives. In addition they had to prepare lessons and teach academic subjects. GVS rarely made allowances for lapses in any of these spheres. He would walk around the hostels in the middle of night to see that all was well. If some child was coughing he would bring it to the attention of the house-parent. If some child was shivering he would cover him with his own warm shawl.

As Headmaster, he was exacting and demanding, but at the same time caring and concerned. He always insisted that schoolwork should come before any personal concerns or advancement. But he could also go to great lengths to help teachers in need. He also helped to finance poor students. Even after children left the school he would continue to guide and counsel them, and in case of need, offer them financial support. His students loved and revered him to the extent that even today the survivors, well into their eighties, gather together each year in Madras to celebrate his birthday.

### §5.6 A Master and His Apprentices

Subba Rao made his presence and his thoughts felt in every sphere of the life at school, including the type of clothing students could wear their diet and how much they should eat. Every item they should bring to school was listed, and nothing extra was allowed. Indian-made items, including soap and toothpowder, were mandatory.

The respect that Subba Rao commanded from students and teachers was partly due to his caring relationships and partly due to the historical context. It was a time of sacrifice, of nationalism and struggle for a cause. GVS never lost his devotion to Annie Besant and the ideals for which she stood, but at the same time he never ceased striving to understand and put into practice Krishnamurti's teachings. Where the two differed on points of educational practice, he sometimes held with Mrs. Besant. For instance he remained a confirmed Indian nationalist, in spite of Krishnamurti's vigorous critique of nationalism. He discouraged students from joining the civil service or taking up any job under the British Government. Most students followed his advice. When the Second World War broke out, he refused to allow collections for the war effort to be made in the school. He maintained it was not India's war and had nothing to do with the aspirations of her people.



GVS encouraged freedom to think and read, and there was no particular ideology he advocated. Some of his students became members of the Congress, of the Justice party and of the Communist party. In fact his liberal views finally led to his departure from Rishi Valley, after the British police discovered communist literature on the campus.

The Headmaster also created an atmosphere of liberal tolerance towards religion. The school had no religious instruction, but devotional songs were sung at assembly and a few religious holidays were celebrated. Students and teachers included Hindus, Muslims and Christians, and caste distinctions were disregarded. All students and teachers ate together regardless of their different backgrounds. Partly to combat caste prejudice, GVS invited a young Harijan named Joshua to read his poems to students. Later, Joshua became a famous poet of South India. And this was in a time when caste and the idea of the superiority of the Brahmin were very prominent in South India.

GVS did his best to bring about academic excellence in the school, and a spirit of enquiry. For his own part, he kept in touch with educational experiments in other parts of the world, employing qualified teachers, supervising their work and providing them insights on how to improve, reading to the children and making a vast library accessible to them. He was an orderly and systematic person, who demanded that his teachers prepare their lessons well in advance.

The library subscribed to some expensive journals that would be useful for teacher development as well as for students, including *The British Journal of Educational Psychology* and also *The Architectural Record*, which were provided “in order to stir the imagination” Although the school was always short of funds, library acquisitions were given high priority. Students from those days have commented on how much pleasure the library gave them, how it made them curious and kindled their interest in many things. Ample periods were provided for reading and homework. It was normal for children to spend a couple of hours each day in the library, reading serious books or browsing over pictorial volumes. Books were arranged in such a way that alcoves for quiet study were created between them. It was a large collection, estimated at some twenty thousand volumes.

Always alert to improvements that might be effected in educational methodology; GVS would gather his teachers together and explain new ideas to them. Within a broad framework he sketched, teachers were encouraged to experiment to improve their techniques. GVS also encouraged “in-service training” for his teachers. One year some teachers participated in a course on the measurement of intelligence, meeting every day after dinner to study texts and discuss their application. One or two would take notes and later type them out for distribution to all members of the group the next morning.

Another group learned speed-reading. Outside the curriculum, teachers were also encouraged to participate in group activities, including sports and drama.

### §5.7 The Learning Atmosphere

Lessons were often organised into ability groups rather than according to age or class. In accordance with the “Dalton Plan,” students worked out their own plans for self-study and were expected to do a considerable amount of independent work, proceeding with carefully graded assignments at their own pace, with supervision and help from a teacher.

Tamil and Telugu were the languages of conversation in the school. Children were encouraged to read magazines and books in English, and teachers kept a register of the number of words in their vocabulary and common mistakes in usage and spelling. The errors of each student were carefully analysed and corrected in remedial lessons. For each subject, records were kept to record students' achievements in memorising poetry, answering questions, and 'dramatic expression.'

Geography was made attractive by frequent excursions that were very systematically planned. A daily chart was posted to record the position of the sun, range of temperatures, wind direction, amount of rainfall, and so on. History was taught with a world perspective. While discussing Tipu Sultan, students would learn what was happening in the rest of the world, and might discuss Napoleon at the same time. They learned nutrition and hygiene by observing what they ate and how they lived.

Science teaching was particularly innovative. Everything was taught through practical work. The laboratory was very well equipped. Students learned how to mix hydrogen and oxygen in a bottle to get water through small explosions. They designed and made a working steam engine and a wireless radio from odds and ends. The radio could receive broadcasts from as far away as Colombo. They also made other models, clocks and electric motors. Botany and Zoology included local field trips to study various plants and trees around the campus, and to observe the behaviour of birds, bees and butterflies around the farm. Students learned Mathematics through worksheets that enabled them to move at their own speed and ability.

Frequent tests were held to enable students to consolidate the ground covered before proceeding to the next lesson. No marks were given, but by 1937 a comprehensive reporting plan had been developed, recording levels of achievements in all school activities including games, music, excursions, work experience, leadership, reading, in addition to academic achievements in subjects. This system of reporting was designed to develop confidence and reduce competition.

### §5.8 Activities

To help students comprehend different ways of living, GVS carefully planned a series of eight excursions, each one slightly longer and more challenging, so as to give children a sense of the diversity of life and customs in India and to free them from an insular or regional outlook. Each excursion lasted three to four weeks. Children visited Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Islamic sites; historical places associated with different periods and dynasties; ashrams and educational institutions of different types; plantations, factories, industries, dams, and much more. Each child was given a notebook and had to write an account of what they saw and experienced. They learnt new songs and folk dances, ate the food of each different region and brought back samples of rocks, stones, leaves, flowers, tea and manufactured goods. Within a week to ten days of returning, each group had to arrange an exhibition of the materials they had collected and give an account of their experiences. Then each group brought out magazines with their drawings, writings and charts. It was an educational experience that widened their minds and expanded their ways of thinking. It was a practical experiment to get them to drop prejudices and limited or narrow ideas.

Music, dance, drama, sports and games also had an important role in the life of the school, as did discussions on every aspect of children's lives. Music, art and crafts were placed in the middle of the day's timetable, as a relief from intense concentration on academic subjects.

GVS valued drama as a means of self-expression and also as a training-ground for language development. Tamil students took part in Telugu plays and vice-versa. Before putting on English plays, the senior students would read the whole play for themselves as supplementary study in language. Every fortnight a small play or some other form of entertainment was presented by different groups, either a house or a class. At the end of each school year, there was a special entertainment extravaganza. It was a festival spread over almost a month, including short plays, operas and dance-dramas presented at different locations on the campus. Most students and many teachers participated in these activities. At the same time the classes went on, gradually yielding way to the demands of rehearsals.

Games were compulsory for boys and girls of all ages. Everyone took part in an annual Sports Day, and both winners and losers received a posy of flowers. Winning was not stressed, but rather enjoyment of the activities and exercise as a natural part of healthy growth. When some children did not have hockey sticks, Subba Rao provided them from his own money. Swimming was introduced as a kind of survival training. Beginners were placed in the water on their own (under supervision) and they quickly learned to keep afloat.

Two afternoons were set apart for work experience. On these occasions, all students took part in some work. They made their own choices and even at times suggested projects that would be useful to the school community. Some of the projects undertaken were digging, planting, and watering in the school garden; assisting in the dairy and laundry; laying roads; classifying and cataloguing books in the library; levelling playgrounds; washing dishes, cutting vegetables and cooking in the kitchen. Subba Rao believed that children should learn by experience. He had read widely and developed these ideas from John Dewey. All work was to be a learning experience.

Senior children were given various responsibilities. Some senior girls were assigned younger children to "look after" as big sisters. Other senior students were house-captains, and helped in escorting younger children on their homeward journeys. Some senior students helped in making arrangements for tours, excursions or for groups of visitors to the school.

#### §5.9 "Their Own Discipline"

It was a harmonious community life. As one visitor remarked "Teacher and taught live and move together. The teacher willingly effaces himself and is content to be in the minor role of an elder brother, a friend and guide. Pupils learn self-reliance ... and provide their own discipline." The Headmaster was himself a very disciplined person who expected others to learn from his own example of hard work, love, care and exacting standards. He was a strict disciplinarian and a hard taskmaster. One of his colleagues remarked: "He does not spare himself and so does not spare others who work with him."

In those days the cane and humiliating punishment were common in Indian schools, but under GVS there was no question of corporal punishment. He was a hard taskmaster with a blunt manner but a large heart. His students reported having a mixture of love affection, respect and fear for Subba Rao. On the whole, he maintained discipline with a caring, affectionate attitude, coupled with the respect and awe students felt for him. He studied each individual child carefully, disclosed their character faults, and tried to help them grow and develop strong minds and strong character.

#### §5.10 The End of an Era

Everything seemed to be going smoothly and the school was becoming known as a model institution. But in 1941 a disagreeable incident drew an end to the Subba Rao era. On the 24th of June, with a new academic session just beginning, there was a surprise police raid on the school. Some “prohibited books” and leftist magazines were seized. Several teachers were placed under house arrest and eventually were fined and put on probation for three years. Two veteran teachers were officially ordered to resign by the Director of Public Instruction. Later it emerged that a disgruntled senior student had acted as an informer to the police, telling them precisely where to look for communist literature. Because of this incident, Subba Rao was labelled as ‘dangerous’ in the context of the Independence Movement and the wartime constraints of the period.

GVS firmly believed in freedom of thought. He allowed teachers and students to read any books and think for themselves. He did not try to influence them or persuade them to read anything in particular, but gave them access to a very wide range of literature. He believed that Krishnamurti would have wanted such freedom. But some Rishi Valley Trust members held him personally responsible for endangering Rishi Valley by allowing ‘subversive’ literature in the school.

There were other problems also. The school had been running at a deficit and the financial position was deteriorating. The Trust wanted fees increased and expenses curtailed, but Subba Rao felt that many parents could not afford to pay higher fees; and he did not want to cut back on facilities. Capital expenses on building and equipment were unavoidable at this stage, so the school was always short of funds. For these reasons, the relationship between Rishi Valley Trust members and GVS became strained. Finally in June 1942 he resigned as Principal, although he remained on campus in various capacities for several years.

After leaving Rishi Valley, GVS went on to found a new school, Bala Bharat, in Madras. He ran this school along Montessori lines until the early 1960’s and then retired to spend the rest of his days quietly at Adyar. His friends and associates formed a Trust in his name. They published three books in his honour and gathered each year in Madras to celebrate his birthday. Subba Rao died in 1986, at the age of 85; but the Trust continued its activities and annual birthday gatherings long past his centennial anniversary.

### §6. Interlude (1942-49)

#### §6.1 A Few Unsteady Years

As soon as Subba Rao resigned, the Trust began to make changes. Expenditures were cut back sharply. Extracurricular activities were curtailed. Some of the best teachers left. Academics soon languished and students were neglected. Slowly an unruly element emerged. The next few years saw a succession of Principals with very short tenure — Y.K. Shastri, K.A. Venkatagiri Iyer, Narayana Iyer, and K. Srinivasa Raghavan. During this period, standards declined and Subba Rao's many contributions were eroded. Things got out of hand when some senior students became aggressive and refused to go home after the end of their final year. They stayed on campus and created a great deal of mischief.

This was also a period when Krishnamurti was away from India. During the war years (1939-45) he was interned in California as an "undesirable alien" and was not allowed to give public talks. He was out of touch with the school and did not return to India at all until 1947. The first phase of Rishi Valley School was drawing to a close. A new phase in the life of the school was about to start.

#### §6.2. The 'Community'

In late 1947 Krishnamurti had returned to India after an absence of many years, and he renewed his interest in education. One of the people who helped to give a new direction to Rishi Valley at that time was Miss Muriel Payne, an English nurse who was then in Bangalore. According to one observer, Miss Payne "was a big woman, intensely energetic. The head of a nursing organisation during the war, she sold her nurse's training college and came to India. She had known Krishnamurti for many years and was said to have nursed him when he was seriously ill in Ojai just after the war."

Miss Payne proposed to Krishnamurti that a group of people might work together to revive Rishi Valley. Her down-to-earth capacity to organise combined with her physical stature and strong will, made her have little patience for "inefficiency," and she tended to deal with people rather harshly. In the event, Miss Payne and five others were invited to set up an experimental 'Community' in Rishi Valley. In August 1948, the six of them worked out a plan and a method of functioning. In addition to Miss Payne there were two other European expatriates and three Indian members, including Subba Rao. They resolved to live and work together under certain principles they derived from Krishnamurti's teachings: working together as equals without authority or leadership and striving to be self-supporting with an equal standard of living. Miss Payne put forward the hope that Rishi Valley would become a magnet for others with an interest in applying Krishnamurti's teachings in practice.

The school was still running, but soon afterwards, for various reasons the Community took steps to phase it out. Parents and teachers were given notice that within six months the school might cease to exist "in its present state," and were advised to seek berths elsewhere. There was some thought of continuing operations on a reduced basis, with less than fifty children and a skeleton staff in residence. But before this plan could be put into effect, the "Community Experiment" abruptly came to an end. In July 1949, The School, Rishi Valley closed its doors, and soon thereafter Miss Payne closed the Minutes Book for the Community with the words: "A dream has ended." It was a dream that had lasted for less than one year. However Miss Payne's involvement with Rishi Valley was not

over. She was a major catalyst in reopening the school the next year under a new administration and with a new Principal, Gordon Pearce.

Mr. Pearce was an experienced educator who, nearing retirement age, had just accepted a senior appointment as a Secretary to the Ministry of Education in Ceylon. He was prevailed upon to resign that well-paying position to become Principal at Rishi Valley, on condition that Miss Payne would provide certain guarantees, including education for his two sons.

## §7: Experiment in Freedom (1950-58)

### §7.1 A New Beginning

“In April 1950, Gordon Pearce came to Rishi Valley. His first impressions were rhapsodic: “Those of you who know the place will not be surprised when I say that the peaceful beauty of its remoteness almost takes one’s breath away... The ancient rocky hills here enfold the gentler beauty of trees and cultivation, bright green where the crops are standing, brown grey where the fields are fallow, with great undulating stretches of rich brick-red soil streaked by marks of the plough in readiness for the next planting of groundnuts as soon as the rains come. That was how I saw it in the clear cool morning air soon after sunrise on the day of my arrival, standing on the top of the hill south of the school. It was unspeakably lovely.”

It was time to begin again. Krishnamurti had resumed his talks in India and was once again taking an active interest in his school. New people were involved, and a new and different type of school was to emerge. In an early report, Pearce announced that the school was reopening with English as the medium of instruction, in the hope of attracting students from all parts of India. He went on to stress the importance of the natural setting: “One of the strongest points in favour of carrying out our experiment in [this] environment ... is that we are here daily face to face with the actual needs of human existence in their simplest form; we live and work in direct relationship with those who produce food, clothing and shelter, and by sharing that work and its difficulties, we learn to value it correctly, neither too little nor too much.”

To attract a wide range of students, fees were adjusted downwards to a minimal level, which placed very tight constraints on the budget. Members of staff agreed to work for some time on subsistence salaries in order to help the school get off to a good start. School reopened in July with fifteen pupils. By the end of August the number rose to twenty-four, but only a few of these were full paying boarders. More than half of them were day scholars, children of teachers or estate workers. There was a strong spirit of promise and a sense of ‘experiment’ in living as well as in education.

### §7.2 A Different Style of Management

Gordon Pearce was given the difficult task of restarting the school when finances were low and friction was high. At the time he joined Rishi Valley, he was already sixty years old and had a long career behind him. Forty years previously he had briefly served as Principal of the Theosophical School in Madanapalle. Later he started the Scindia School

at Gwalior and served as Director General of Education for Gwalior State. He wrote extensively on education and was one of the founders of the Indian Public Schools Conference.

Pearce was a large man with a gentle manner — never dominating or imposing, always ready to listen to others and engage in discussion. He did not like unpleasantness. When conflicts arose, he tried to keep the peace, pacifying and moderating, never strongly voicing his own views. But he did have fairly clear views on many issues. When he disagreed with his colleagues or staff-members he conveyed his feelings in writing. He wrote notes and chits to colleagues, explanatory letters to parents, and reports on the school to Trustees. He carried on a large correspondence, carefully responding to each point in every letter received from others. He also wrote textbooks and essays on education, along with articles for the newspaper. Because he kept copies of virtually everything he wrote, he left ample documentation of his years at Rishi Valley.

Mr. Pearce believed in the power of reason, perhaps to a fault. If children complained about something, he would reason with them. If they misbehaved, he would gently but firmly reason with them. If teachers rebelled, he would reason with them. If conflicts arose he would try to resolve them through a process of reasoning. Over a period of years certain limits to this approach emerged. But for Mr. Pearce it was the correct way for an honourable person to proceed.

### §7.3 Initial Problems

In a series of letters to Miss Payne, Pearce discussed his financial worries and also voiced a certain sense of apprehension about the challenges awaiting him: “I hoped that my experience of Indian education might be useful and that my alleged reputation might be helpful in getting Rishi Valley School restarted. At the same time... I did not come solely and primarily for running a school myself... I want to help to create and carry on in-relationship with others, a centre for experimenting with Krishnaji’s teachings. I feel that is the most important thing in life ... Bull do not enjoy running the school ... It is no good ... pretending that I know how to run a school on the new lines.” He goes on to say “what a terrific job we have undertaken ... how extraordinarily thrilling it is.”

An additional problem was a terrible drought. Just one year before Pearce had seen the valley looking green even in a dry season. But now “It is certainly very painful to watch the tender green of the growing crops turning yellow, and to know that that is happening to the crops of all the poor peasants around here for miles and miles.” The whole District was declared a famine area.

### §7.4 Gaining Ground

Within a year, Mr. Pearce was able to write: “It is nice to see the school beginning to smarten up a bit and the children looking bit less ... wild.” By late 1952, he was rather optimistic: “The school is getting on really well now, and I am beginning to feel able to recommend cultured parents to send their children here.” Over the next few years, numbers continued to increase until the targeted level of 110 fee-paying boarders was reached, and then there was a waiting list for admission. New staff members joined, including a few very able teachers. The student population grew more diverse, with

eighty percent coming from northern, eastern and western India, and from overseas. All students learned Hindi, and Telugu was offered as a mother tongue.

Krishnamurti was now visiting the school for several weeks each year. Many discussions took place, on the aim of the school, on freedom, on educational methods, and on other aspects of Krishnamurti's teachings. Experiments were in progress on different methods of education. The school seemed to be vibrant and alive; it was gradually placing itself on a firm base, and tried out new methods of education.

#### §7.5 Teachers of a High Calibre

In one of his essays, Pearce wrote: "the creation of a school of this -type needs teachers of a very exceptional kind." And his staff during these years included a good number of talented and energetic young teachers. Instruction in math, physics and chemistry was of a high quality. Pearce himself was a proficient teacher of English and geography. He used to delight students by drawing maps on the blackboard with both hands at once. The most colourful and by several accounts the strongest teachers during this period were David Horsburgh and Sardar Mohammad.

David Horsburgh was a master teacher with great talent, initiative and all-round abilities — a polymath who could teach virtually any subject, from literature to carpentry. He was practical, learned and erudite. His personal library was vast. He knew several languages, including Telugu and classical Sanskrit. He was an accomplished craftsman and a keen dramatist. He was also a born rebel with a mischievous sense of fun. He gained special permission to break certain of the school rules, including smoking and skipping assemblies. In return, although he personally disliked exams, he was willing to administer them because of their practical value for accrediting students. Horsburgh always dressed casually, in his own standard outfit, and went barefoot everywhere. With an exceptional flair for the dramatic, Horsburgh was an inspiring teacher. He was eventually honoured with an MBE for contributions to education.

Sardar Mohammad, another outstanding teacher, joined Rishi Valley in 1955, after resigning from Doon School on a dispute of principle. Pearce described him as a first rate teacher of English and History, "in which he keeps himself right up-to-date by much reading and observation ... He shows exceptional initiative in arousing the interest of pupils in literature, art and current affairs." Students describe him as "immaculately dressed and very good-looking, with a distinguished grey beard." He was a master sportsman in tennis and cricket. He was a voracious reader, who could often be found sitting under a tree in the afternoon, reading "the latest literary work." He was an exceptional teacher in English and History. Like Horsburgh, he had a fierce independence of mind. Sardar was himself a highly disciplined man, but did not believe in imposing discipline on others; he wanted them to decide what to do for themselves. But, as one of his students recalled, "he would permit no sloppy thinking."

Sardar and Horsburgh became close friends, though in some respects they were temperamental opposites. One was a fastidious, introverted, stubborn man of hard principles; the other was a barefoot, fun-loving, mischievous free spirit. They were brought together by circumstances, by their lively intellects, and by a strongly rebellious nature.



### §7.6 Patterns of Learning

A concerted effort was made to reduce authority in the classroom and get children to learn under their own volition. In the senior school, a modified form of the Dalton Plan was brought back to provide for individual rates of progress in studies. In the junior school classes were kept small, with fifteen students or less, allowing for close attention to individual needs and abilities. The Children's Section" (Class 3 and below) was once again run along Montessori lines. In this way much of the methodology of Subba Rao's time was restored. Some of the major differences were in the medium of instruction, which was now English and in the degree of freedom now accorded to teachers and students alike. Students, when admitted to the school were tested in different subjects. They were not placed in any specific form or class. Each subject was allotted a classroom, and students moved from class to class according to their level in a particular subject. Teachers were available for consultation.

Mr Pearce had been involved in education all his life. He was keenly interested in educational experiments, and had made a thorough study of the Dalton Plan, which had been used in Rishi Valley by GVS many years earlier. Pearce brought back the Dalton plan in a modified form. Students were to work at their own pace on assignments, under the supervision of a teacher. Each student was to maintain a plan of work and keep a record of assignments completed, just as they had done earlier under Subba Rao.

Under Mr. Pearce, the Dalton Plan was modified to give much more liberty to both teachers and students. The close monitoring and discipline of Subba Rao's days was relaxed to a considerable extent. Exactly how much freedom they enjoyed is somewhat unclear. Students who were interviewed gave varying accounts of the degree of freedom they had in pursuit of their studies. Some of their accounts may have been coloured by nostalgia. One old student recalls attending "very few" classes and spending long hours in the craft-workshop, until the last couple of years when he prepared for the SSLC exam. Another old student recalls swinging on a tree instead of attending class. She says that the Principal told her "That's right, swing harder," as he walked by. Some boys remember fishing, or swimming, or climbing hills during class hours. But Mahalakshmi, one of the young staff-members of those days, reports that class attendance was actually fairly regular. While some students cut a few classes occasionally, absenteeism was not common, according to her. And she reports that a close watch was discreetly kept on students. They were encouraged to attend classes. They were also allowed to sit in the library. And, when they missed a class, they would be asked how they had spent their time.

### §7.7 Activities and Culture

Apart from academics, students were able to hear and learn both North Indian and South Indian music. International folk dancing was introduced during this period by an American teacher, David Young. Local folk dancing was brought in by David Horsburgh, who played flute and table and also joined in the dancing, with great zest. Hiking, trekking, and camping, was an integral part of Rishi Valley life, in those days, with rock-

climbing and mountaineering for the more adventurous. Sathibai, who joined Rishi Valley in the mid-1950's, arranged frequent outings and picnics for the smaller children.

One of Pearce's long-lasting innovations at Rishi Valley was the institution of *asthachal*. He had introduced this earlier at the Scindia School, where it still survives. Children gathered together daily in the evening, to sit quietly while the sun was setting. It was a short but peaceful space of time, which gave children an opportunity for quiet reflection and observing nature or watching their own thoughts.

"Trustees wanted students to be more closely associated with the land. An attempt was made to do this. As in the earlier days, the children had their own small vegetable gardens near the houses. Among the things they grew were carrots, tomatoes, and beans. David Horsburgh started a small farm and encouraged students to be involved in it. Children enjoyed pulling up groundnuts and collecting tomatoes in baskets, as they got to eat some too. They planted maize, and looked after poultry. David took six children to live with him on the farm. He wanted to educate them differently. Mr. Pearce allowed this 'School within the School' to go forward in spite of opposition from a group of teachers and from parents who didn't want their children to be quite so close to nature as they were in this experiment—living in close proximity in crowded quarters with sheep and goats nearby.

#### §7.8 Academic Standards

Mr. Pearce was quietly enthusiastic about his "experiment" and wrote about Rishi Valley in glowing terms. It all sounded very idyllic, like a dream in the process of being fulfilled. But what was really happening? Some students definitely felt that Pearce was providing that atmosphere of "academic excellence" that Krishnamurti talked about, with a minimum of external discipline. Every year students prepared for exams and most of them passed successfully. After completing school, many of them led successful lives in terms of careers and achievements. At the school, educational experiments were in progress, and they generated a certain amount of controversy. Letters, records and interviews provide a variable picture of the prevailing situation.

In 1954, one student passed the Cambridge School Examination with distinction in several subjects, and one student failed. Six students passed the Andhra Matriculation examination and again one failed. In 1955, Mr. Pearce reported to the Foundation an ongoing experiment in individualised learning in the Senior School, with students working under a group of teachers known as Senior Tutors, who met weekly to discuss students' general progress and the needs of each pupil in turn. The next year Pearce reported in the Senior School "an. increasing sense of responsibility regarding studies." Four out of five candidates that year passed the Andhra Matriculation exams. In 1958 Pearce reported further progress "in helping the children to work and play without the stimulus of fear in any form (punishment, reward, competition, marks or promotions). In spite of "a few difficult cases" he felt that the quality of academic work had "very much improved." He also reported that the school was by then attracting a sufficient number of candidates, to be somewhat selective in admissions; and that preference was being given to those whose parents shared the school's "determination to replace "the usual methods of securing academic achievement" by intelligence and a sense of responsibility.

Mr. Pearce wrote extensively on the aims of the school, on Freedom, and on the elimination of fear. In one essay entitled "*An Unusual School*," he wrote about "the complete development of each child as an individual and as a good citizen." In an essay entitled "*An Adventure in Education*" he outlined his sense of "an experiment in living with children and in finding out how to help them to grow into intelligent, sensitive, and integrated human beings," which he described as "a daring adventure"

#### §7.9 A Loss of Confidence

Considerable efforts were made to individualise the academic system. Teachers decided the level for each child in each subject. Students progressed at their own pace, with no promotion and no annual exam. According to their abilities, students were allowed to move far ahead in a given subject while others were given remedial work and extra help. From time to time, students' abilities were informally assessed and adjustments were made in their 'levels' for each subject. The plan was "to bring all pupils up to the standard required in each subject for public examinations," by the time the end of the course is reached, and at the proper age."

Not all of the parents were convinced. Some were naturally apprehensive about their children's future. In spite of Pearce's attempts to explain the "Experiment in Freedom," many of them felt there was not enough discipline. In this uncertain atmosphere, Sardar and a few others reacted in ways that stirred up the insecurities of parents and a faction of teachers.

David Horsburgh's appearance did not appeal to conventional parents. He went around the school barefoot, in shorts, and sported a gingerly unkempt beard. One parent, a high-ranking army officer, looked at Horsburgh and exclaimed 'Is my son to be taught by a man like that?' A few parents removed their children to put them into more conventional schools for the final two or three years. Before long this situation attracted the concern of Trustees, who became convinced that the school was 'going wild.'

Mr Pearce came under pressure to 'tighten up'. As he attempted to do this, the situation destabilised. Two groups, which had for some time been in conflict within the school, now became openly hostile to each other. Mr Pearce tried valiantly to moderate between those who carried the banner of 'freedom' and those who called for 'order'. Having worked so diligently to promote freedom, Pearce was now called upon to retrench. Some of his best teachers were at the eye of the storm. Two of them were exceptionally gifted teachers. David Horsburgh had caught 'the spirit of freedom' and carried it forward with great zest. In a less dramatic but perhaps more determined way, Sardar Mohammad was in full revolt. The pursuit of freedom had released energies that were difficult to control, and in any case Pearce had long ago renounced all the instruments of control, apart from reason and calm persuasion.

The Trustees wanted both freedom and order together, and they were not willing to compromise or choose between them. They became sceptical that Mr. Pearce could carry out this difficult balancing act. They began to see him as wavering and indecisive. In this context Mr. Pearce's own earlier doubts resurfaced. He was both disturbed and confused by the collapse of his dreams for Rishi Valley. At a special meeting held in October 1958, he tendered his resignation and brought the Experiment in Freedom to an end.

Mr. Pearce had only a few more years to live, but he founded two more schools in that short time. The Blue Mountains School was in some ways a continuation of the Experiment in Freedom, on a smaller scale. Several of his teachers followed Mr. Pearce and joined the Blue Mountain School. He also helped to found the Sandur School, with Mahalakshmi as its first Principal. Mahalakshmi led the Sandur School until her retirement in the early 1990's. During her last years there she was Chairperson of the Indian Public Schools Conference.

David Horsburgh joined the British Council and was very active in the Bangalore Little Theatre. In the 1970's he founded his own school, Neel Bagh, in a very remote village near the Andhra-Karnataka border. It was a free school for local children, almost entirely supported by royalties from Horsburgh's prolific writing. He carefully trained his own teachers, some of whom went on to found their own village schools in turn, on the model of Neel Bagh. The exceptional quality of Horsburgh's educational work has been widely recognised.

Sardar Mohamad spent two brief interludes teaching at Blue Mountain School and tried his hand at various occupations during the nearly three decades remaining of his life. He had always been "a very private person" and not much is known about his last years. One of his students met Sardar in Bombay near the end of his life, and asked him how he felt about the years at Rishi Valley. Sardar told him: "Look, we made a lot of mistakes, but... a few of our students may have absorbed something of what we were trying to do. Looking back, I feel that Krishnamurti gave us a good frame of reference ... but we also put in something of our own to fit the situation as we saw it."

### AFTERWORD: THE SECOND FORTY YEARS

By Alok Mathur

The 1960s began with a new Principal, Dr S. Balasundaram, who remained head of Rishi Valley School for nearly twenty years, until he was succeeded by Mr. G. Narayan. The beginning of the 1980s saw a transition to a different kind of period, distinguished by collective administration, through committees and with increased responsibility carried by teachers. Radhika Herzberger, Alok Mathur, Dr. A. Kumarawamy and Dr. Shailesh Shirali, all joined as teachers and later became senior administrators. Rebecca Thomas, a biology teacher, was appointed as Headmistress and later as Principal when Mr. Narayan retired. She was succeeded by Dr. Shirali in the early 1990s.

During each of its major periods the school assumed a new character, with its own distinctive culture. Teachers and students responded with a different emphasis to the deep vision of life and education that J. Krishnamurti had tried to implant in the school. Each period brought new possibilities and new themes into prominence. Embedded in the way the school is today one can discern all the rich layers of its past history. And perhaps one can get a better perspective on Rishi Valley School when one is armed with some knowledge of its past.

What Mr Pearce left behind as his legacy was a feeling for individual creativity and goodness, which he had felt could only develop in an atmosphere of freedom.

When Dr. Balasundaram took charge as Principal, he was a young, energetic man with a very different temperament from his predecessor. Dr Balasundaram was a research chemist who had been a keen student of Krishnamurti's teaching ever since the late 1940's. He had worked at Rishi Valley in various capacities under Mr. Pearce. Before long the students, who must have missed the benevolent and fair-minded Mr Pearce, were won over by Dr. Balasundaram's considerable charm. All through his long stay in the school, he tried to keep in close contact with students and their families, who affectionately called him 'Balu'.

The first task Dr. Balasundaram undertook was to give a new direction to the Estate and Dairy. He addressed some land problems and tried new ways of planting crops to increase productivity. He also set about raising funds to strengthen the infrastructure. Many of the larger buildings — the Assembly Hall, the Senior Girls' and Boys' Hostels, and the Dining Hall — were built during this period. Enrolment was increased to 200 and with the additional fees, the school became financially stable for the first time. It still had an ail-India character, but now a greater proportion of students came from the South, and particularly from Andhra State. There were also a few teachers and some students from abroad,

During the 1960s the school became less informal and greater structure was introduced in the administration and also in academic learning. Many new teachers joined every year, and clearer guidelines were given to them by the Principal. Rebecca Thomas, M. Hamid and Jayprakash, three teachers who later became Headmasters in their turn, joined the school in this period.

By the end of the 1970s the school had grown to more than three hundred students and in many ways it was doing well. Music and dance, and the arts in general, were of a very high standard. The students who passed out were successful in life. But a number of teachers and some Trustees felt that it was again time for a new direction. A great deal had rested on the leadership of one person, and perhaps the pendulum may have swung now towards too much structure and too little discussion and reflection among teachers and students. Krishnamurti began to seem a distant figure to students, even though he continued to visit the school almost every year.

For close to twenty years, Dr. Balasundaram served as a stabilizer and a builder. Perhaps his major contribution during his long tenure as Principal was to build stability. He formed a network of contacts who would help the school. But now an initiative began for rediscovering the founding principles of the school and for a new collective spirit. To begin the next phase, Mr G. Narayan, a former Rishi Valley teacher who was currently teaching in England, was invited to return as Principal of the school.

As we come closer to our own personal experience, it is harder to keep a clear perspective on the changes in the school — and it has been a period of many changes. Since I joined in 1982, I have been witness to many changes. I will confine myself here to sketching out only a brief outline of the major features of the more recent period.

One major change was the energy that Krishnamurti seemed to pour into the school in the last years of his life. Mr Narayan had a good grasp of Krishnamurti's teachings and he encouraged discussion amongst teachers and students. Krishnamurti held very intense meetings with teachers and engaged with students in much more meaningful discussions. Some of them were moved greatly by these, and a new level of understanding was

possible in the school during the last years of his life. Some of our old students from that period later became teachers at Rishi Valley and in other Krishnamurti schools.

Many new people with an interest in Krishnamurti's teachings joined in the 1980s, and a new kind of management structure was evolved. The Principal was no longer the only central figure with responsibility and authority. A Managing Committee was created with seven or eight members, most of whom were teachers. Radhika Herzberger, who had had a long association with the School since the late 1960s, joined as Director of Studies and later was appointed Director of the Rishi Valley Education Centre. When Mr Narayan retired in 1988 and Rebecca Thomas was appointed Principal, the school for the first time had two women as its chief administrators. They complemented each other well, and the school acquired a supportive yet disciplined atmosphere.

Gradually the culture mellowed. A more friendly atmosphere evolved between students in different classes. A large number of highly qualified younger teachers joined the school and relations between students and teachers grew more informal.

Two areas where new initiatives took firm root are in environmental activities and the emergence of an energetic and innovative Rural Education Programme. With regular afforestation and water-conservation measures, the school and its surroundings became greener than ever. In 1991 Rishi Valley was designated as a Bird Preserve, and work began on the book, *Birds of Rishi Valley and Renewal of Their Habitats* which was the first volume in the Rishi Valley Education Series, of which the present History is volume 10. The Bird Study programme grew into an Institute of Bird Studies and Natural History, which now supports a Home Study Course in Ornithology that enrolls students from all over India. More programmes and resources were developed with which to reach out to the villages around the School. Relationship between the school and its rural neighbours has also improved considerably. The Rural Education Programme, which began with sixteen Satellite Schools in neighbouring villages, created an active Training Centre that has reached out widely to other states and other language groups.

The 1990s were also a time for construction and reconstruction. New hostels were built and old ones were renovated. Facilities were improved and increased although enrolment was held stable. The Junior School was expanded and new Arts and Crafts facilities were added. The Old Guest House was converted in a Study Centre, and several cottages for visitors were built in the Mango Grove. As this is being written an extension to the Senior School will provide much more room for library, staff and visitor facilities.

After Krishnamurti's death in 1986, concerned people in the school came to feel an increased sense of responsibility for sustaining a large vision of education and trying to work out an understanding of its place in their lives.

The 1990s saw many rapid changes in Indian society, which affected young and old alike. In a sense, new educational problems emerged from these changes. There were changes at the level of the teacher body also. Whereas most teachers were single earlier, the staff grew to be much more family-oriented, and staff children joined the school in numbers that came to require considerably expanded facilities for the very earliest years of education.

With these broad-brush-strokes, I have tried to paint an impression of the culture, character and achievements of each phase in the school's history, if we look with a

certain eye, we may see that the major themes of each period remained shaping factors for later periods in the School. One thing that survived all changes is a concern for independent thinking and excellence of learning that can be traced directly back to the early years. There is also a concern for freedom, its right meaning and right place in daily life. The experiment of the 1950s, though it may have faded from memory, left its mark on the School, as did the felt need for structures and concern for order of the 1960s and 1970s. Added to these has been a heightened sense of responsibility for the environment, for regeneration of the landscape, and for reaching out in various ways to enhance the educational opportunities for children from the surrounding villages.

### Note on Sources

*Interviews:* The text is based on more than fifty interviews with old students and teachers from Rishi Valley School and Guindy School, and with Trustees who had been connected with those schools.-Many of these interviews were conducted by Dr. Dalai in 1992-93, and others were conducted by the present editors from 1993-94 onwards..

*Material on G.V. Subba Rao:* A wealth of information was provided by Subba Rao's old students and colleagues. Special mention must be made of Sri A.R. Nityananda, son of GVS's associate Rajagopal Iyengar; and Dr. J. Mangamma, who worked with GVS as a young teacher and who still maintains an active association with Rishi Valley School. We also consulted three books on GVS written or edited by K.V. Sharma, et. al.: *Hridayanjali*, *Offerings to Sri GVS On His 71<sup>st</sup> Birthday* (1962); *Remembering GVS* (1980); and *GVS, Architect of Rishi Valley* (undated).

*On the Aims of Education:* Sources for quotations given in this section may be found in the study *Krishnamurti on Values in Education* (Rishi Valley Study Centre 2001), especially in Chapter One, "Human Goodness and the Aims of Education". That study closely documents the notion of education as a means of bringing about good human beings and social change.

*Concerning F.G. Pearce and his Staff:* In addition to many interviews with students and teachers from this period, Mr. Pearce left a large number of documents, including essays, school reports, notes and correspondence. The account of Sardar Mohamad is based on interviews with his students, and on memoirs received from his former colleagues. Smt. Mahalakshmi, who was closely associated with both Horsburgh and Sardar at Rishi Valley in the middle and later 1950s, gave us several interviews and answered many outstanding questions. David Horsburgh is close to our time, and memories of him are still very strong. Several of his associates provided interviews, and we also had access to several vivid memoirs of his theatre days in Bangalore.

*General Sources:* A number of details in this account have been checked against Minutes of the Rishi Valley Executive Committee. Minutes of Krishnamurti Foundation India and its predecessor organisations Foundation for New Education, and the Rishi Valley Trust. Also a few other historical sources that may have been consulted by Dr. Dalai but were not identified in the "archival draft" she deposited in the Rishi Valley archives.

*Talks and discussions:* Krishnamurti came to Rishi Valley very often to interact with teachers and-students of the School, as well as to address a wider audience in public

talks. Nearly two hundred of these talks and discussions have been recorded. Many of these talks and discussions will appear in a forthcoming collection, *Krishnamurti at Rishi Valley*, under preparation by Krishnamurti Foundation India.

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